

Mary of Bethany: Extravagant Devotion to Jesus

I. GOD’S FIRST PRIORITY: THAT WE LOVE GOD WITH ALL OUR HEART

A. The Spirit is establishing the first commandment in first place in the Church worldwide. We must intentionally cooperate with God’s grace in order to cultivate wholehearted love for God.

³⁷You shall love the LORD...with all your heart... ³⁸This is the first and great commandment. (Mt. 22:37-38)

B. Loving God with all our heart is the **first** commandment because it is the first priority to God. It is **great** because it has great impact on God’s heart and our heart. It is the greatest lifestyle.

II. MARY’S EXTRAVAGANT DEVOTION: FEEDING ON THE WORD (LK. 10:38-42)

A. Mary was never mentioned in the book of Acts or in church history. She was not known by people for her public ministry. Nonetheless, she will be known forever for her extravagant love for Jesus.

³⁸A certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. ³⁹She had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus’ feet and heard His word. ⁴⁰But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, “Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me.” ⁴¹Jesus answered and said to her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled [bothered; NAS] about many things. ⁴²But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.” (Lk. 10:38-42)

B. **Sat at Jesus’ feet:** The Spirit emphasized that Mary sat at Jesus’ feet to hear His word (10:39). Mary is mentioned in three occasions in Scripture. Each time the Spirit highlights her as sitting at the feet of Jesus (Lk. 10:39; Jn. 11:32; 12:3 [Mt. 26:6-13; Mk. 14:3-9]). Reading Scripture is meant to help us to talk with God by giving us the “conversational material” used in devotional prayer. (For free notes: *How to Meditate on the Word; How to Pray-Read the Word*, see mikebickle.org)

C. **Distracted:** Martha was distracted with much serving (10:40); she was worried and troubled by many things (10:41). Jesus did not correct Martha for serving, but for serving with a wrong spirit. Martha receive a correction similar to the one that Jesus gave the church of Ephesus (Rev. 2:4).

²“I know your works...³and you have...labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary. ⁴Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. (Rev. 2:2-4)

D. **One thing is needed:** Sitting at the feet of Jesus positions us to be empowered by Holy Spirit. Jesus settled the issue of how important this heart posture and lifestyle is. There is no substitute for this.

E. **The good part:** Jesus honored the wisdom and power of this lifestyle by calling it “good.”

F. **Has chosen:** Mary chose this lifestyle (10:42). We also must choose it. No one can choose it for us.

- G. **Not taken away:** Jesus prophesied that Mary's heart of devotion would not be taken away from her (10:42). Grace for a lifestyle of extravagant devotion could be sustained throughout her life if she continued to choose it. At the judgment seat of Christ, her life will be rewarded (1 Cor. 3:14).

III. MARY'S EXTRAVAGANT DEVOTION: UNOFFENDED IN CRISIS (JN. 11:1-43)

- A. One of the most important expressions of extravagant devotion is in trusting Jesus' leadership in a time of crisis when He does not intervene in the way or the timing that we expected Him to.
- B. Mary expected Jesus to intervene sooner by healing Lazarus before he died. She fell down at His feet (11:32) *to worship and weep*. She trusted Jesus' leadership instead of becoming offended at Him. He was moved to tears by seeing her worship Him with trusting love and weep in pain.

*¹Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha...
³The sisters sent to Him, saying, "Lord...he whom You love is sick."
⁴When Jesus heard that, He said, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God..."
⁶So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was...
¹⁷So when Jesus came... [Lazarus] had already been in the tomb four days...
²⁸[Martha] called Mary her sister, saying, "The Teacher...is calling for you."
²⁹...she arose quickly and came to Him...
³²when Mary... saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died."
³³Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping...
³⁵Jesus wept. (Jn. 11:1-33)*

IV. MARY'S EXTRAVAGANT DEVOTION: "WASTING" HER LIFE (MK. 14:3-9)

- A. Mary's lifestyle of choosing "good" by hearing the Word equipped her for other "good" choices.
Principle: Unusual acts of devotion come from cultivating a spirit of devotion as a lifestyle.

*³Being in Bethany at the house of Simon...as He sat at the table, a woman [Mary; Jn. 12:3] came having an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard [perfume]. She broke the flask and poured it on His head.
⁴Some were indignant...and said, "Why was this...oil wasted?
⁵It might have been sold for...300 denarii [one year's wages] and given to the poor."
They criticized her sharply.
⁶Jesus said, "Let her alone...she has done a good work for Me...
⁹Wherever this gospel is preached...what this woman has done will be told as a memorial to her." (Mk. 14:3-9)*

- B. **Very costly:** The perfume was worth 300 denarii (a year's wages)—a significant financial cost.

³Mary...wiped His feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance... (Jn. 12:3)

²⁴"...nor will I [David] offer...offerings to the LORD...which costs me nothing." (2 Sam. 24:24)

- C. **Criticized:** The apostles appealed to serving the poor as their reason to criticize her extravagance; that is, they appealed to a scriptural mandate to help the poor. Those who love Jesus like Mary will receive criticism sometimes from those who want the gift of salvation without deeply loving Jesus.
- D. **Why this waste:** Anything above minimum commitment to God is seen as an "unnecessary waste."

- E. ***Let her alone***: Jesus vindicated Mary (14:6). In the age to come, He will openly reward devotion.
- F. ***A good work***: A year earlier (in Luke 10), Jesus had commended Mary for choosing the “good” part in sitting at His feet to hear His word; she developed her personal history in God in this way.
- G. ***Memorial***: Mary’s extravagant devotion is remembered by others because God remembers it.
C.T. Studd wrote, “***Only one life, t’will soon be past. Only what’s done for Christ will last.***”